

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-17

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3888

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 1516

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ELAD, CS

SUBJECT: LABOR CELEBRATES MAY DAY

BEGIN SUMMARY: ORGANIZED LABOR OBSERVED MAY DAY WITH THE TRADITIONAL PARADE AND UNION LEADER SPEECHES IN SAN JOSE. EXCEPT FOR SOME MINOR DISTURBANCES WHICH OCCURRED AFTER THE CELEBRATIONS AND WHICH WERE EASILY HANDLED BY THE CIVIL GUARD, THE CELEBRATION WAS UNEVENTFUL. PRESIDENT FIGUERES ADDED TO THE DAY'S FESTIVITIES IN ANOTHER FORUM -- THAT OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY'S FOURTH AND FINAL SESSION OF THE 1970-1974 TERM. HIS SPEECH LARGELY SUMMARIZED THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF HIS ADMINISTRATION. END SUMMARY.

1. COSTA RICAN LABOR CELEBRATED MAY DAY BY ORGANIZING ITS USUAL PARADE THROUGH SAN JOSE CENTER AND SPEECHES IN CENTRAL PARK. THE CELEBRATION WENT OFF UNEVENTFULLY, BUT THE CHARACTER OF THE CROWD WAS NOTICEABLY MORE POLITICAL THAN IN PAST YEARS. IN EVIDENCE WERE THE USPITZOZ PLACARDS ASSAILING "YANKEE IMPERIALISM" AND THE OPRESSION BY LAND OWNING OLIGARCHS, BUT IN ADDITION THE LEFTIST POLITICAL PARTIES HAD BROUGHT OUT THEIR MEMBERSHIP FLAGS AND BANNERS. THE CROWD OF BETWEEN 3,000 AND 5,000 DISPERSED IN LATE AFTERNOON WITH NO INCIDENTS. HOWEVER, SHORTLY AFTER THE FORMAL CELEBRATION ENDED THERE WERE SEVERAL INCIDENTS
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OF STOREFRONT WINDOW BREAKING AND GENERAL RABBLE ROUSING BY GROUPS OF YOUTHFUL ACTIVISTS SAID BY CCTD SOURCES TO HAVE BEEN STIMULATED BY THE LEFTIST EXTREMIST GROUP MOVIMIENTO REVOLUCIONARIO AUTENTICO (MRA). MRS ORGANIZERS, IN AN APPARENTLY SPONTANEOUS MOVE, WERE SAID TO HAVE MOVED THROUGH THE CROWD ENLISTING SUPPORT FOR THE DISTURBANCES. THE CIVIL GUARD DISPERSED THE YOUTHFUL PARTICIPANTS AND ARRESTED SOME 50 OR 60.

2. DESPITE THE LATE AFTERNOON DISTURBANCES, THIS MAY DAY WAS APATHETICALLY RECEIVED BY THE LABOR MASSES. THE MILK PRICE ISSUE FAILED TO GENERATE THE ENTHUSIASM HOPED FOR BY THE LEFTISTS AND THE THREATENED GENERAL STRIKE OVER THIS ISSUE EXPECTED IN SOME QUARTERS TO HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED, WAS FORMALLY RETURNED TO THE UNION ORGANIZING COMMITTEES FOR FURTHER STUDY.

3. ANOTHER OF THE DAY'S FEATURES WAS FIGUERES' ANNUAL "STATE OF THE UNION" MESSAGE DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE NEW SESSION OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY. UNLIKE LAST YEAR, WHEN THE PRESIDENT MERELY DELIVERED A FEW OFF-HAND AND PERFUNCTORY REMARKS, THIS YEAR'S MESSAGE WAS CAREFULLY PREPARED AND READ BEFORE THE ASSEMBLED DIGNITARIES. THE MOOD WAS PRIMARILY ECONOMIC, AND REPEATED FIGUERES' FAVORITE THEME WAS COSTA RICA'S PRIMARY ECONOMIC PROBLEM IS THE CONCENTRATION OF WEALTH IN THE HANDS OF THE RICH. HE SAID THAT COSTA RICA OVER THE PAST THIRTY YEARS HAS SUCCEEDED IN HALVING THE NUMBER OF POVERTY-STRIKEN CITIZENS, REDUCING THEIR PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION FROM TWO-THIRDS TO ONE-THIRD. FIGUERES BLAMED THE LACK OF SOLIDARITY AMONG DIFFERENT SOCIAL CLASSES AS THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE PREVALENT MAL-DISTRIBUTION OF INCOME IN COSTA RICA.

4. TURNING TO THE RISING COST OF LIVING, A SUBJECT OF MUCH CRITICISM IN COSTA RICA OF LATE, FIGUERES NOTED THAT THIS WAS A PHENOMENON THAT HAD AFFECTED ALL NATIONS OF THE WORLD, AND SAID THAT COSTA RICA'S PROBLEM WAS NOT SO MUCH HIGH PRICES BUT RATHER LOW-- AND POORLY DISTRIBUTED-- INCOME. THE PRESIDENT ATTACKED THE WEALTHY CLASS FOR EXCESSIVE CONSUMPTION OF LUXURY ITEMS-- MOSTLY IMPORTED-- AND BLAMED THE CENTRAL BANK'S CREDIT POLICIES (ANOTHER FAVORITE FIGUERES TARGET) FOR MAKING THE PURCHASE OF A COLOR

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TV EASIER THAN THE PURCHASE OF A WORKING MAN'S TOOLS.

5. SUMMING UP, FIGUERES SAID THAT IT IS NECESSARY NOT ONLY TO ASSIST THE LOWEST-INCOME GROUP BUT ALSO TO RESTRICT THE CONSUMPTION OF THE WHO CONSUME TOO MUCH. THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT EVEN THOUGH THE AVERAGE

PERSONAL INCOME IN COSTA RICA IS SUFFICIENT ENOUGH THAT NO ONE NEED LIVE IN MISERY, IT STILL IS INADEQUATE TO PERMIT EVERYONE TO LIVE A MODEST AND DECOROUS LIFE. THE PRESIDENT DEVOTED THE REMAINDER OF HIS SPEECH TO A DETAILED ACCOUNT OF HIS ADMINISTRATION'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN MANY DIFFERENT SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENDEAVORS, FIGUERES CLOSED BY REFERRING TO PRESIDENT NIXON'S "ERA OF NEGOTIATION" AND STATED THAT COSTA RICA'S FOREIGN POLICY ALSO IS DEDICATED TO THE STRENGTHENING OF WORLD PEACE. HE THEN CONGRATULATED THE POPE, AND THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE UNITED STATES, THE USSR AND WEST GERMANY FOR THE GREAT EFFORTS THEY HAD MADE TOWARD WORLD PEACE.
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